

Corporate Parenting Annual Report

2021 – 2023





Contents

- Chair's Foreword4-5
- Governance6-7
- May and December 2022 Ofsted Inspection..... 8
- Children in Care and Care Leavers Data Highlights9
- The Voice of the Child 10-11
- Health and Emotional Well-Being 12-13
- Emotional Well-being and Mental Health 14-15
- Life and Memory Work 16
- Education and Attainment 17-18
- Skills, Training and Employability 19-20
- Access to Services 21
- Safeguarding and Stability 22-23
- Preparation for Adulthood Review 24
- Conclusion 25



Chair's Foreword



Welcome to Sandwell Council's Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2023, where we will highlight the improvements members and services have achieved for our Children in Care and Care Leavers throughout September 2021 to March 2023.

In June 2022, I became lead member for Sandwell Children and Education and chair of Corporate Parenting Board for the second time. I am proud of what has been achieved by our young people and partners this year. As members and officers we actively listen to, advocate and engage with our young people. Their involvement in the board continues to be invaluable, with the Forum for Independent Young Adults (FIYA) chair co-chairing the board meetings. In 2022, there were two key Ofsted inspections. The full inspection (ILACS) saw Sandwell Children's Services progress from being 'Inadequate' to being graded 'Requires

Improvement to be Good'. Sandwell Children's Trust Adoption Services also progressed from 'Requiring Improvement' to being rated 'Good'. These positive results highlight continuing improvement of services and our commitment as a system to achieve the best outcomes for our children and young people.

The Corporate Parenting Board too has undergone a process of review and development. During 2022 a new programme of thematic deep dives was implemented to help us to identify gaps in services and identify tangible goals to support our young people to become healthy and successful members of society.

Between October and December 2022, Sandwell's partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA) resulted in training sessions for Sandwell Council's cabinet members, elected members and the Corporate Parenting Board. The training provided further understanding about what makes a corporate parent and how we can become better corporate parents.

In 2023, Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board will continue to champion our Children in Care and Care Leavers and strive to deliver improved services.

We aim to ensure:

- All councillors know and sign our newly redrafted Pledge.
- An enhanced profile and renewed focus on Corporate Parenting through the launch of our first annual corporate parenting week in 2023.
- Sandwell Council continues working in partnership with the LGA to become a beacon for good Corporate Parenting practice.
- Sandwell Council, Sandwell Children's Trust and wider partners, plus the private sector become the 'family business' by offering jobs and apprenticeships to our Care Leavers.
- All reports demonstrate their impact on our Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board supports our NHS partners to put free optical and dental prescriptions in place for Care Leavers 18-25 years old.

Sandwell Council, Sandwell Children's Trust and wider partners will continue to listen, champion and engage with our Children in Care and Care Leavers

across all services. We are proud that our Care Leavers are now eligible for free medical prescriptions and value their continued participation at the Corporate Parenting Board.

Thank you to Sandwell Council Corporate Parenting members for supporting our children and young people and enabling them to thrive.

Most importantly, thank you to all our children and young people for being brilliant and brave and continuing to share your stories, engaging and participating with the Corporate Parenting Board.

We have good practice from across the Corporate Parenting Board, yet we know there is more to do to ensure our children become healthy and successful members of society. Therefore, in everything we do, as corporate parents, I would ask you to stop and question, "Would this be good enough for my child?"

**Councillor Simon Hackett,
Chair of Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board
Sandwell Council's Cabinet Member for Children
and Education**



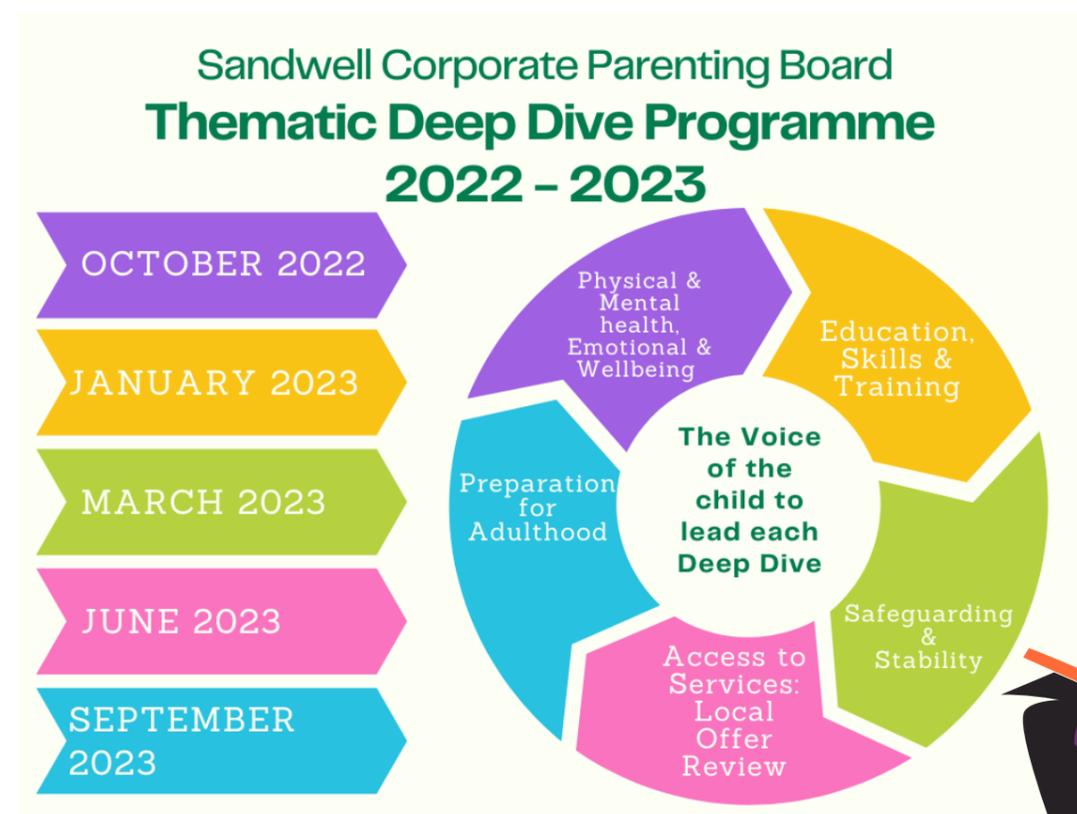
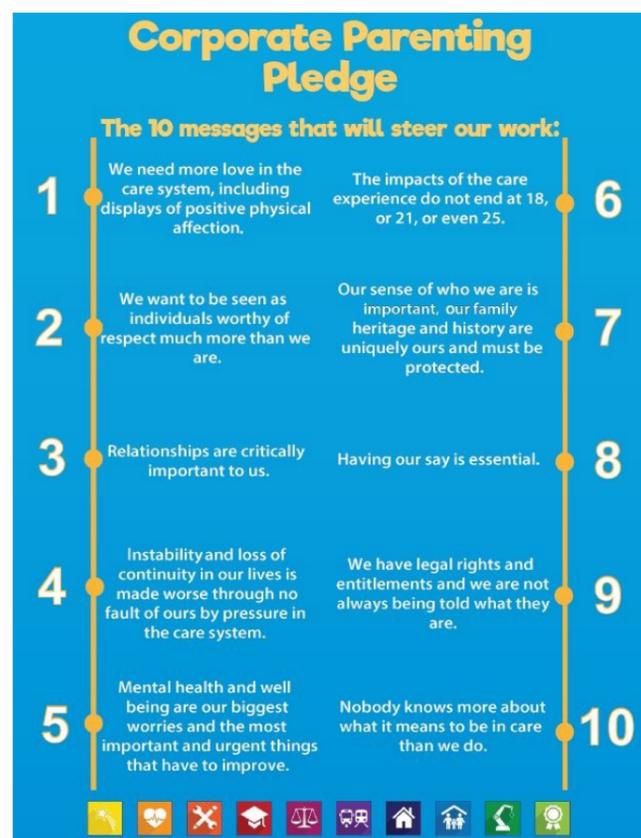
1 Governance

- 1.1 The report will highlight Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board's progress and achievements for our Children in Care and Care Leavers throughout September 2021 to March 2023 where our services have supported our young people in adjusting to society's 'new normal' post Covid-19.
- 1.2 Corporate Parenting Board members actively engage with young people through two forums, Voices of Sandwell (VOS) for 10 to 18-year olds and the Forum for Independent Young Adults Forum (FIYA) for 18 to 25-year olds. There is a genuine interest in listening to young people's views, wishes and feelings to ensure their concerns remain the service's central focus and drive future development.

- 1.3 In November 2021, the Strategic Corporate Parenting Group (SCPG) was formed. It continues to meet monthly with service partners to tackle key actions and concerns raised at the previous Corporate Parenting Board meeting and plans for the next board meeting. The group updates and tracks activities on the Corporate Parenting Action Plan 2022 - 2023 to drive forward the Corporate Parenting Strategy (2020-2023).
- 1.4 The board completed a full self-assessment in June 2022. As a result, both board members and young people agreed to strengthen the terms of reference and decided on an annual programme of meetings based on thematic deep dives led by the child's voice.
- 1.5 In October 2022, the first deep dive concentrated on Life Story work, emotional well-being, mental health, and physical health. Young people discussed how they felt services could help them and shared that this may be at different times for different people. It highlighted the need for consistent support when young people first enter care, free medical prescriptions, and a greater understanding of who should be involved in Life Story Work. As a result, our Care Leavers are now exempt from prescription costs if they are 18 to 25 years old; also, our young people re-named Life Story work to Life and Memories and a full review was undertaken that informed positive changes.
- 1.6 In January 2023, the board's second deep dive focused on education and attainment, skills, training and employability. As a result of the deep dive, we have implemented a Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) Strategy plan which targets 16-24-year-old and those at risk of becoming NEET with specific targeted actions around 19-21-year-old care leaver NEET group.

- 1.7 The board's third deep dive in March 2023 focused on the safeguarding and stability of the child's journey while in the care system. This session provided the board with a clearer understanding of the pathway a child takes once entering care.
- 1.8 The Corporate Parenting Board partnered with the LGA between October and December 2022. Lead members, elected members, Corporate Parenting Board officers and young people all received training which concentrated on:
- What is a Corporate Parent?
 - What makes a good Corporate Parent?
 - What can Corporate Parents do to raise awareness for Children in Care and Care Leavers?
 - The role of the cabinet in being effective Corporate Parents

- 1.9 The aim was to ensure there is clear and consistent understanding of the role, with each person promoting outcomes for the children and young people within their organisation, service area, directorate and within the cabinet. The Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board continues to work with the LGA to strengthen its Corporate Parenting practice.



2 May and December 2022 Ofsted Inspection

2.1 In May 2022, Sandwell received a full Inspection Local Authority Children Services (ILACS) Ofsted inspection and improved the Ofsted rating from 'Inadequate' in September 2017 to being rated 'Requires Improvement to be Good'. Ofsted was positive about children and young people's engagement.

"The Voices of Sandwell group is regularly consulted on how to improve support to Children in Care, through regular attendance at corporate parenting boards. An active group, it enables children's involvement in a wide range of social activities. This group is involved in and proactively influences service developments, learning events and the induction of new staff"

"The responsibilities of the corporate parenting model, to ensure that those in care and Care Leavers receive the opportunities they are entitled to and make the progress they are capable of: impact is starting to be seen in the incremental increase in the number of Care Leavers in education, training, and employment."



2.2 Sandwell is part of a Regional Adoption Agency called Adoption@Heart. This operates across the Black Country and includes Wolverhampton Council, Dudley Council and Walsall Council.

In December 2022, The Trust's Adoption Services were inspected where improvements were noted in all areas and an overall grade of 'Good' was achieved. Some direct quotes are highlighted below:

"Children are provided with life-story work and books as well as later-life letters, which are mostly child focused. Inspectors saw some good examples of life-story books and later-life letters, which were personalised, and creatively and sensitively."

"Children who have communication challenges are placed with adopters who understand their needs and vulnerabilities. Adopters are sensitive to children's needs and provide individualised care. As a result, children can express their views and feelings to skilled adopters."

"Children are introduced to adopters in a planned and sensitive way. When introductions take place between children and adopters, these are managed well. Adopters are supported to develop strategies to help manage children's feelings and build positive relationships."

3 Children in Care and Care Leavers Data Highlights

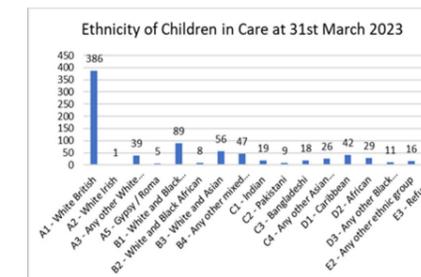
Children in Care

There were 802 children in care at 31st March 2023:

53% are male, this is above the Sandwell 2022 mid-year population estimate (52%) but below the England average of 56%.

47% are female which is slightly below the Sandwell 2022 mid-year population estimate (48%) but above the England average of 44%.

Age Group	Count at 31st Mar 23	Percentage
0-4	159	20
5-9	201	25
10-15	307	38
16+	135	17
Total	802	100



As 31st March there were 14 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC - This was 5 for Dec 2021).

Young people with the same social worker for the last 12 months has improved since September 2021 from 17.9% to 27.2% at the end of March 2023.

Care Leavers

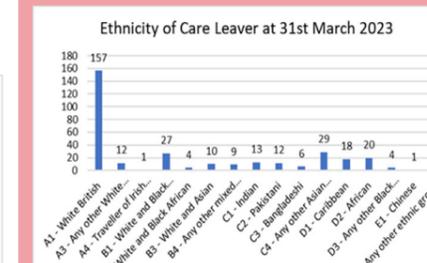
At 31st March 2023:

The total number of care leavers was 350 between the ages of 16-24.

Age Group	Count at 31st Mar 23	Percentage
16	1	0.2
17-18	80	22.8
19-21	203	58
22-24	66	19
Total	350	100

Care Leavers are predominantly male at 61%

with 38% being female and 1% indeterminate.



Accommodation

CIC long term placement stability: 63.1% - This was 69.7% for Dec 2021.

In the last 12 months 8% of CiC had 3 or more placement moves. This was 6.9% in Dec 21.

87.2% of Care Leavers are in Suitable Accommodation. This was 88% in Dec 21.

Health

For Children 5+:

Review Assessments, 65.2% of eligible young people have had their assessment within timescale by March 2023. This was 74.5% for Dec 21.

Dental checks, 57.9% of eligible young people have had their check within timescale by March 2023. This was 17% for Dec 21.

Education, Training and Employment

In the academic year ending July 2022, 92% of Personal Education plans were completed.

85% children in care attend an education setting that is 'good/outstanding (+5% from 2020 and +5% above the national average) 17% of CiC attending Outstanding schools.

Average attendance for children in care at July 2022 was 94%

86.7% of Care Leavers have had an updated

Pathway Plan in the last 6 months – this was 68% for Dec 21

45.7% of Care Leavers are engaged with education, employment or training – this was 52% for Dec 21

4 The Voice of the Child

4.1 Voices of Sandwell are a group of young people aged 10 to 18 who have experienced the care system first-hand. Meeting every fortnight, they discuss issues that concern young people in care, then act as the voice in Sandwell. They participate in consultation events, attending Corporate Parenting Board meetings and other relevant meetings and activities which concern Children in Care. As a group, they are extremely proud of the progress and achievements made over the past two years and enjoy representing young people's views, improving the service they receive and making a difference.

4.2 FIYA (Forum for Independent Young Adults), formerly known as the Care Leavers Forum, is a group of care-experienced young people aged 18 years old and older who have experienced the care system. They also meet fortnightly and focus on matters that concern young people who have left care and act as the voice for Care Leavers in Sandwell forums.

4.3 VOS and FIYA continue to co-chair and engage with the Corporate Parenting Board, leading on take-over challenges, interviewing staff, taking part in staff inductions and interaction in public events.



4.4 Young people from both groups were involved in speaking to Ofsted inspectors during 9 - 20 May 2022 ILACS inspection. They shared their views and suggestions on how things have improved for children and young people across Sandwell. Ofsted praised their interaction with the inspectors and mentioned the positive impact being made on behalf of Children in Care and Care Leavers in Sandwell.

4.5 The Trust's Participation Team and Care Leavers Forum members visit children new to the care system. They inform young people about their rights, how to access support, how to make a complaint and how they can get involved in making a difference through the forums.

4.6 Here are some of the achievements made by VOS and FIYA over the past 2 years:

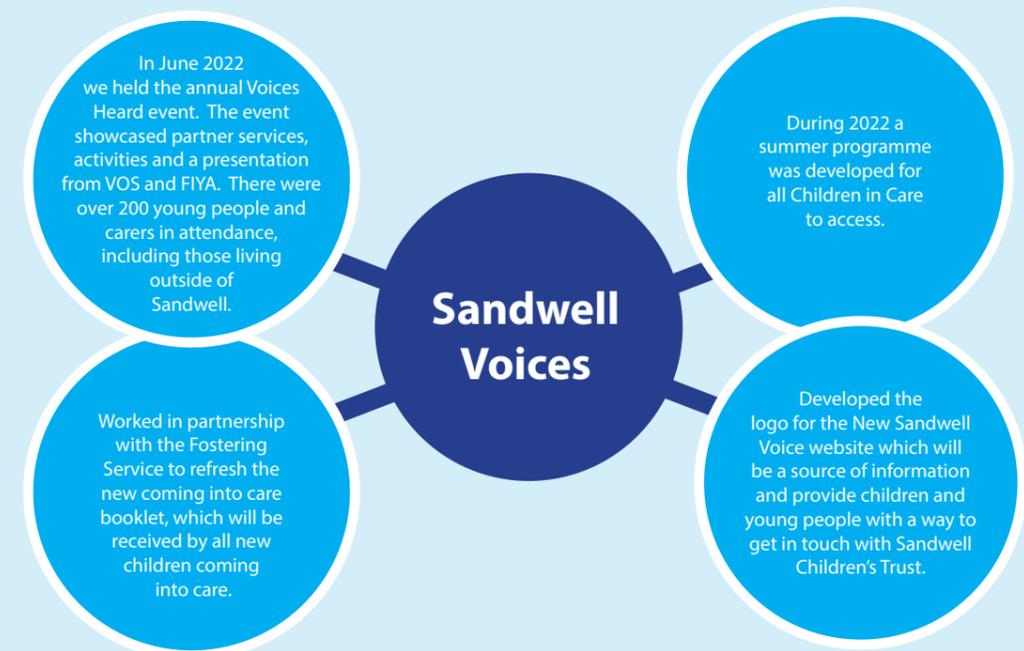
4.7 A key project this year was the commissioning of the video 'Care Leavers Project' by Sandwell Neighbourhoods Team. KRUNCH Sandwell raised awareness of issues and stigma faced by our Care Leavers. By working together with the Participation Team and FIYA to develop the video, which focused primarily on accessing accommodation. The video is available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6HUDBD56ho>



4.8 The Care Leavers Project video was launched at the Care Leavers Award Ceremony on 26 October 2022, during National Care Leavers Week. It has been showcased to professionals in Sandwell and presented to children, young people, and professionals at national events. Later in 2023, the video will be presented to staff in the Neighbourhoods Team in workshop settings across Sandwell, to ensure the services which are provided to Care Leavers, meet the needs of young people.

4.9 In 2021, the West Midlands Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS) and Participation Lead Network undertook an exercise to develop the 'West Midland Regional Care Leaver Offer Blueprint'. As a result, Sandwell is reviewing its Local Offer by identifying key priorities for improvement.

4.10 Between June - December 2022, a task and finish group conducted a gap analysis of the existing Local Offer for Sandwell Care Leavers. The analysis identified gaps in the service that need financial support. It suggested lead agencies and determined and estimated the maximum costs involved in achieving the goals outlined in the blueprint. The Strategic Corporate Parenting Group will take the analysis into account and work closely with FIYA and VOS to set objectives and develop a series of actions to improve the Local Offer.



5 Health and Emotional Wellbeing

5.1 Between April 2021 - March 2022, a health needs analysis of Children who entered care was undertaken. This included an examination of Initial Health Assessments (IHA), immunisations, as well as developmental delay and physical health.

The findings were as follows:

- 24% of children needed a referral to optometry - meaning their difficulties seeing have not been explored and correct treatment not commenced before entering care.
- Over a third of children entering care have routine childhood immunisations outstanding, making the child more vulnerable to preventable diseases which can cause illness, disability and death.
- Over a quarter of children appeared to have developmental delays during the Initial Health Assessment, the most prevalent being a speech delay at 13%. Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust children's therapies department have acknowledged the extra vulnerabilities that Children in Care have and responded by ring-fencing appointment slots each month for the sole use of Children in Care.

5.2 The Designated Nurse for Children in Care monitors the completion of health assessments through a range of mechanisms. Six monthly auditing is undertaken with regards to initial and review health assessments to examine timescales of completion, communication and quality compliance. Continuous improvement is achieved through considered feedback and education.

5.3 During the financial year 2021/2022, 93% of Review Health Assessments (RHA) were completed. The overall completion rates for the year still demonstrate a positive picture, despite staff shortages in the provider team. 85% of children entering care during 2021/2022 were seen within 20 working days from receipt of notification from SCT.

5.4 Sandwell piloted the Care Leavers passport app in January 2020. The app enables the user to keep important information about health, appointments, health history, immunisations, medications and allergies in one secure place, making it easily accessible at the click of a button. Since the launch, data shows that there have been 500 downloads from app stores and 200 young people have been provided with a paper copy. Following a positive audit and feedback of the app, the Integrated Care Board (ICB) is supporting an update, making it available to all Care Leavers across the Black Country.

5.5 The nursing team holds a 'drop-in' health session for Care Leavers at the Metsec Building. In June 2022, it was reinstated following the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.6 By March 2023, there were 14 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in care. When entering care, they receive a welcome pack and their health needs are assessed.



5.7 Data has shown a downward trend in the percentage of children over 5 who received a dental assessment within the last 12 months. The Designated Nurses have worked collaboratively with a paediatric dentist from NHSE to create a Child in Care dental pathway.

5.8 Black Country ICB agreed to free medical prescriptions to our Care Leavers (18-25) in January 2023. There continue to be discussions to obtain ongoing funding for prescription pre-payment certificates for individuals who would not otherwise be eligible for free prescriptions.

5.9 In 2022, 142 young people entered care with 62 having their initial health assessment completed within the timescale (44%). For review assessments, 82.9% of eligible young people have had their assessment, and 42.2% have had their dental check within the timescale, by December 2022.



6 Emotional Well-being and Mental Health

- 6.1 Children in Care and Care Leavers have said that their mental health and emotional well-being is a key concern for them, and this has therefore been made a priority within the Children and Family Strategic Partnership and the multi-agency Thrive Board (Led by the ICB and Sandwell Council).
- 6.2 The Children in Care Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CIC CAMHS) has streamlined the referral pathway to access the service, reducing delays for young people receiving support, as part of the task and finish group. This group collaborates on the care leaver blueprint and the corporate parenting plan.
- 6.3 The CiC CAMHS service provides an integrated and consistent approach to children and young people by placing the child at the centre of care provided. The clinicians have received specialist training in approaches that are evidence-based for the highly complex needs of Children in Care. They are also able to access specialist medical expertise. In the past, this team has consisted of 2.4 full-time equivalent multidisciplinary team members, with the

consultant psychologist providing clinical guidance and the CAMHS Sandwell service manager overseeing operations. This year's investment in transformation has allowed the staff to grow to 4.4 full-time equivalents. With the new transformation investment, the team is now effectively working within a 10-week target, whereas before the investment, the team was successfully meeting the national target of 18 weeks for referral to the first appointment.

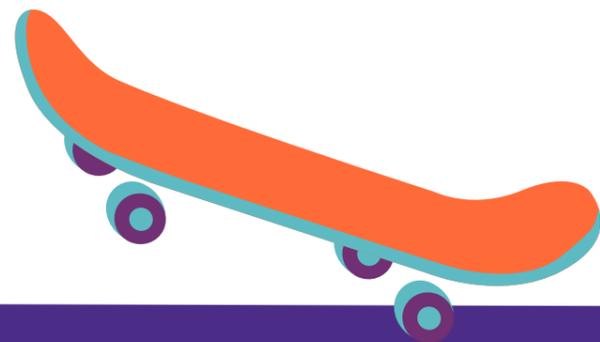
- 6.4 Due to a move to a new information system in March 2022, Children in Care data was not reliable and therefore not reportable. Steps are being taken to resolve this. Currently, all referrals are seen within the 10-week target and there are only two children waiting to be allocated post assessment.
- 6.5 The team provided attachment training and Nurturing Attachments and Complex Trauma Training programme to foster carers who care for children/young people who meet the criteria for specialist CAMHS. With the help of this training programme carers can provide parenting that is attachment focused.

- 6.6 In August 2022, a CAMHS clinical specialist for external placements was employed. The role will be to attend the panel and work closely with all children and young people funded and to need funding from health commissioning. This specialist will closely monitor all placements to confirm the quality assurance and therapeutic interventions provided.
- 6.7 CAMHS Children in Care professionals provide social workers with fortnightly 3-hour drop-in sessions. Depending on the level of complexity three to five cases are reviewed per session, allowing for more systemic and psychological thinking. The cases are overseen by a social care manager.
- 6.8 Black Country Healthcare Foundation Trust (BCHFT) is developing a new flexible model for transition pathways and has recently employed transition worker roles to:
- Work closely between CAMHS and AMHS to ensure a smooth transition. This includes Children in Care CAMHS
 - Enhance the offer for 18-25-year olds ensuring the most vulnerable groups needs are addressed. This includes Care Leavers
 - Provide counselling support for young people 18+ in schools, colleges and universities
 - Development of paid peer support worker roles
 - Collaborative working across the system and across The Children's Trust
 - Co-production of service model



7 Life and Memory Work

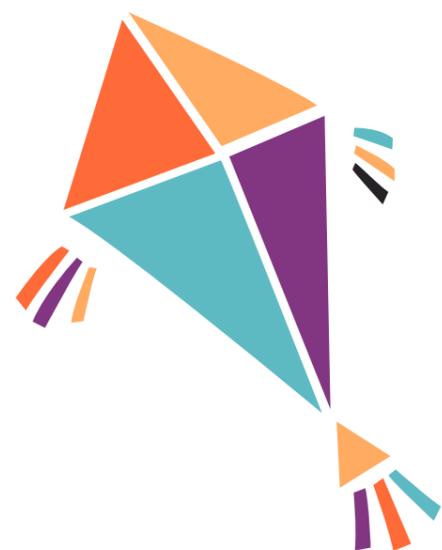
- 7.1 This has been an area for improvement for some time. Although there are some excellent examples of life story work, this has not been undertaken consistently.
- 7.2 A review of life and memory work took place Autumn 2022, it identified barriers in practice, with social workers and other practitioners needing to gain confidence. To support this, high-quality training, guidance, and a structure that allowed the work to be supported by evidence were implemented. The Children's Trust put together an improvement programme, including consultation with children and young people, foster carers, social workers, managers and independent reviewing officers.
- 7.3 Children and young people have directly influenced the name change to Life and Memory Work. This was a powerful message for everyone, providing a clear statement about how our children and young people view their lives and the importance of keeping their memories whether good or bad. The independent reviewing officer's service reports an increase of Life and Memory Work being completed with children and young people.
- 7.4 Social workers, foster carers and other practitioners have been involved in developing all parts of the improvement programme: 'approach', 'purpose', 'roles' and 'responsibilities'; and 'practice standards'. It also means that they understand why they are undertaking the direct work and intervention, what they need to do, and how well they need to do it, so there is a consistent approach.
- 7.5 The Children's Trust's services have aligned their approaches with life and memory work. All internal services now receive regular updates via communications, Principal Social Worker reflective sessions and dissemination through management and team meetings. The effectiveness of the groups will be demonstrated through the use of appropriate resources, practice guidance and training, and system adjustments implemented.
- 7.6 The Children's Trust will continue to ensure everyone is clear about the expectations of the contribution of each key partner agency, which positively add to this work with Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- 7.7 The task and finish group are working on changes to the system and intend to test this out during 2023, with training and practice guidance being rolled out from April to July. From May 2023, the Children's Trust will be producing performance data in relation to the amount of life and memory work being completed.
- 7.8 By October, all social workers, practitioners, foster carers and managers are expected to be trained. Partnership work with our key agency partners will run from Summer 2023 to Autumn 2023. There is a plan to undertake internal quality assurance activity and review during November to understand the quality of the life and memory work undertaken with our Children in Care and Care Leavers and the impact of the improvements made.



8 Education and Attainment

- 8.1 The Sandwell Virtual School continue to have high aspirations for Children in Care and provide every opportunity to access the very best education possible and achieve their potential. This is embodied in their motto - Learn: Achieve: Together.
- 8.2 The May 2022, ILACS Ofsted inspection report stated:
- “Leaders and the head of the virtual school have high expectations for Children in Care. They have worked diligently since the previous inspection to bring about improvements in the virtual school service and have had notable successes in improving the quality of how Children in Care are monitored and supported through education. Most Children in Care attend schools which are good or better and for those who do not, the reasons are clearly defined and in the best interests of the child. Children in Care have a high attendance rate at school.”***
- The Trust's inspection of Adoption Services (December 2022) noted:
- “Children have access to a range of social and educational opportunities. The agency, through its links with the virtual school, keeps track of children's attainment, achievements and progress. When needed, additional support is provided to children without delay. This ensures that children's educational progress does not drift, and the support promotes children's learning.”***
- 8.3 These are some of the achievements for our Children in Care:
- As at October 2021, 49.3% of children and young people were placed in education outside of Sandwell. This is a reduction of 4.8% from the high in 2016 which was 55%.
 - 85% of Children in Care attend 'good or outstanding' education settings with 17% of those attending an outstanding school. This is an increase of 5% since 2020 and 5% above the national standard.
 - There has been an increase of 2.47% in school attendance during the 2022 academic year, with attendance now at 92.82%
 - Schools are being supported to embed trauma informed practices to understand the needs of Children in Care, this has supported the substantial improvement in reducing suspensions. In 2020/2021 there were 145 occasions of suspensions (31.8); to 97 occasions of suspension (16.9%) in 2021/22.
 - Aspire to University currently has 41 Children in Care engaged in the seven-year programme. In 2022, three pupils 'graduated' from the programme moving on to university to study law, software engineering and criminology.
 - 15 Children in Care took part in producing a video for athletes participating in Birmingham Commonwealth Games - Creative Commonwealth – <https://youtu.be/kjrS00dvYVs>

- 8.4 Sandwell's Music Provision is funded to strengthen children's (aged 9-11-year olds) perseverance and self-esteem. Music lessons have been provided to 96 children across 57 schools, with 17 music teachers delivering 30 minute 1:1 lesson. As a result, the band 'IGNITE' have been formed, they have performed two concerts and also at the SIPS Summer Music and Art Festival. There was a presentation evening on the 30th September 2022: 185 children were recognised and 75 attended to be presented with certificates and prizes.
- 8.5 The Sandwell Virtual School has continued to deliver training, engaging 597 service partners and carers, an increase of 88 from 2021.



- 8.6 There were 528 engagements for the Designated Teacher Training, which is an increase of 29.58% of attendees were school staff, 27%, educational professionals and 15% social care staff.
- 8.7 For foster carer training, 20 participants joined Tots Talking for 2-3 years old. 14 Foster carers joined Raising Educational Attainment in Literacy (REAL) for 8 weeks. 6 foster carers attended Bringing different literacy strands to life for 3-8 years old.
- 8.8 **Early Years Foundation Stage (0-5years):** Children in Care attainment rose by 14% (showing a good level of development) since 2021, outcomes nationally rose by +9%. Since the pandemic year 2020, Sandwell have closed the attainment gap by +32%.
- 8.9 **Key Stage 1 (6-7 year olds):** There has been a rise in all areas of attainment for this year group, with increases in Reading (+4%), Writing (+11%) and Maths (+4%), it is clear that attainment has not recovered to the 2019 outcomes achieved. Children with in-school support made significant gains in 2021 with increases in Reading (+27%), Writing (+39%) and Maths (+27%).
- 8.10 **Key Stage 4 (14- 16-year olds):** Attainment 8 is an average score of eight subjects at GCSE, including English and Mathematics. There is a rising 5-year trend in attainment, the average points score has risen by +8.42 from 2019, and +15.62 from 2017. While the attainment of all Sandwell peers' average points scores rose by only 3.5 in points 2019, 87% of children achieved at least one qualification at the end of their Year 11.

9 Skills, Training and Employability

- 9.1 Connexions Sandwell continues to provide independent and impartial career information, advice and guidance to young people moving from school to post 16 Education, Employment and Training opportunities (EET).
- 9.2 Connexions conducted 1103 interventions with Children in Care for year groups 8 to 14 over the course of the academic year 2022. Interventions included advocacy, face-to-face interviews, virtual/online interviews, phone conversations, texts, and emails. Action planning workshops were held for individuals in year 8, 9 and 11 who aspire to progress to higher education or universities.
- 9.3 Apprenticeships are a great route into employment for Children in Care and Care Leavers. Sandwell Council is committed to offering apprenticeship opportunities, with a minimum of 3 ringfenced per year. To make apprenticeships more accessible, adjustments are made to the standard recruitment practice including guaranteed interviews, working interviews and coaching sessions with advisors.
- 9.4 The Think Sandwell employment team works with Children in Care and Care Leavers to help them decide on the appropriate apprenticeship including offers of work experience in a variety of departments and disciplines. The team helps support opportunities within Sandwell Council as well as local employers utilising reverse marketing to sell the skills of the young person. Generating employment opportunities with local employers is vital to ensuring a wealth of opportunity is offered to our Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- 9.5 Whether apprenticeships are internal or external, all Children in Care and Care Leavers apprentices are provided with mentoring in the workplace and support with their onward journey into sustainable employment.

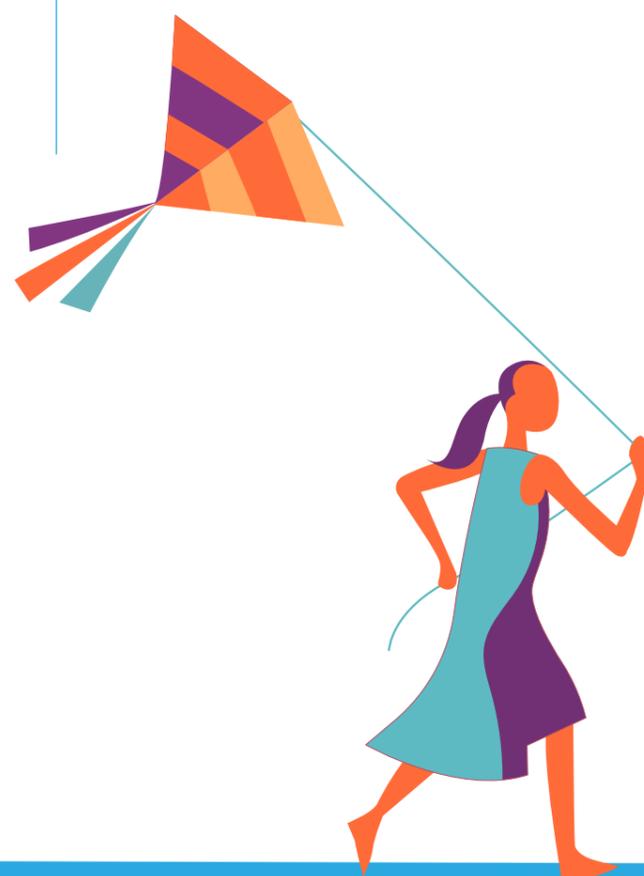


- 9.6 Sandwell Council has a Child in Care and care leaver NEET strategy which sets out how collectively Sandwell Council, the Trust and their partners aim to tackle NEET in the borough, including the key priorities and reaching targets to be achieved.
- 9.7 In Sandwell we have a multi-agency NEET panel which encompasses the Children's Trust, the Education team, Connexions, Employment and Skills and Department for Work and Pension (DWP) where required. This is an example of joint working which puts the Children in Care or care leaver at the centre, allowing key professionals to add to the career journey of the young person and warm referrals to take place.
- 9.8 A dedicated Connexions adviser is allocated for 16-18-year olds who are NEET, with the Think Sandwell employment team continuing the journey from 19 plus. The Impact Project can also offer support for those aged 16-29 delivering bespoke training opportunities which can assist Children in Care and Care Leavers.



9.9 Sandwell Council is utilising social value to leverage opportunities for our Children in Care and Care Leavers. Sandwell Council is placing commitments on large developers awarded large contracts in Sandwell, giving them key performance indicators (KPIs) to work to. These KPIs are put into an employment and skills action plan, which determines what the provider needs to deliver. For example, how many work experience opportunities, school experiences, apprenticeships, and job opportunities they need to meet.

- 9.10 As part of social value, Sandwell Council can use this to leverage additional opportunities for Children in Care with the contractor and their supply chain. Often, the supply chain has more options than the main contractor and can be a local employer established in the community.
- 9.11 A good example of a social value opportunity is the opportunity generated with the organisation rolling out the 'Mail it' system in Sandwell Council. DSI Billing Services Limited Group are offering an employer experience day to a group of 18-24 Children in Care and Care Leavers offering an insight into their business with the potential of following sponsorship opportunities. Meetings were held with DSI in January 2023 with the experience day due to take place in May 2023.



10 Access to Services

- 10.1 The Children's Trust's HOME Programme continues to be a success using training flats to provide a steppingstone to independent living and is usually accessed by 17-18-year olds. It aims to assist Care Leavers to live independently in their own home by providing intensive, housing-related support tailored to their specific needs, assisting them to transition to independent living.
- 10.2 Young people receive support to become tenancy ready. At this stage, they have the choice to either stay in their training flat and take on the tenancy or bid for alternative council housing with Band 1 priority. The programme manages 25 flats and Housing replenish the stock as and when required.
- 10.3 In 2022, 11 young people moved on, 8 young people have moved on to their own tenancy (4 converting their flat into a tenancy and 4 bidding for an alternative tenancy) 1 has moved on to university, 1 has got married and moved in with family, and 1 has struggled to maintain a training flat and has moved in with family. 16 young people have moved into flats in the last 12 months.
- 10.4 Young people usually need 12 months in a training flat before they become tenancy ready. In addition to this resource, we have access to a crash pad, which is a 2-bedroom flat which can be utilised in an emergency to help prevent homelessness for our Care Leavers.
- 10.5 Staying put arrangements for former foster children who wish to continue living with their foster carer after they turn 18 until they are 21 years old. The child's social worker will discuss with the young person and carers about staying put before their 18th birthday.
- 10.6 The accommodation officer will oversee the arrangement for the duration, with regular supervision offered, including extra support from their personal advisor (PA). There are currently 59 Staying Put arrangements, including Care Leavers who are job seeking, working or studying in further education.
- 10.7 Some arrangements are outside of Sandwell, allowing the young person to remain in the area they have lived in, while continuing their education or progress with work until they are ready for independent living. It allows for those Care Leavers attending university to come home during the vacation periods. It helps promote lifelong links for our young people as they leave care. Staying Put is also useful for those Care Leavers who feel they are not quite ready to move on and need time to develop their independence skills.

11 Safeguarding and Stability

11.1 SCT Fostering Service offer placements to Sandwell Children in Care although it is no longer part of Sandwell Council. The agency is registered as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) and its fostering arm is called Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering.

11.2 The Fostering service continues to provide high quality, safe, secure and caring foster families for children who are unable to live at home. Wherever possible and where safe to do so, children will be placed with someone from their extended family or a close family friend, "friends and family" foster placements.

11.3 The agency has an annual recruitment and publicity strategy which focuses on recruitment of foster carers who can meet the needs of Children in Care in the borough. During the period April 22 to March 2023, 14 new carers were approved which is increase of two families compared to the previous year. Between April 2022-March 2023, 10 Connected families were approved.

11.4 The sufficiency strategy includes:

- Recruitment and marketing strategy
- Establish specialist carer provision
- Establish Training programme and support for internal foster carers
- Improved matching and alignment of work with Commissioning team
- Larger bedroom properties for internal carers – discussions with Sandwell Council
- Development of investment to save proposals to improve the offer to Foster Carers
- Use of dedicated space for foster carers to come together
- Extension of Employee Benefits Scheme to Foster Carers

11.5 A bank of Independent Assessing Social workers has been appointed to assist in the growing demand for fostering assessments. This will increase our local caring capacity and reduce the need for young people to be placed out of borough.

11.6 The Fostering service has a fostering panel constituted in accordance with regulation 23 of the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011. The Panel Chair and Vice Chair are independent people, well established members, with professional experience of fostering.

11.7 They are supported by the Panel Adviser, who ensures the service maintains "a central list" of panel members. To support and develop our foster carers there is an annual training plan to ensure foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care.

11.8 Children will be visited in placement by both their own social worker and the foster carer's supervising social worker. Children will be encouraged to express their wishes and views about the foster placement and experience of living with the fostering family.

11.9 The fostering team is committed to providing and promoting safe, stable and nurturing placements where the outcomes and life chances for looked after children are positive. Ensuring we are providing high quality placements to meet the assessed and diverse needs of looked after children and young people.

11.10 The cultural background, religion and language of looked after children and young people and the needs of disabled children are fully recognised and promoted when placement decisions are made.

11.11 The Fostering Service has 97 mainstream fostering families caring for 136 children, and 73 family and friend's carers looking after 158 children. Our largest number of children are with family and friend's carers.

11.12 The child's placement needs are paramount in the matching process. As far as possible we aim to place children within Sandwell so that contact with family and friends, continuity with school and leisure pursuits can be maintained and links to services can be kept.

11.13 To ensure we can keep children closer to their communities and links there is work progressing towards the development of block contract arrangements (referred to as Residential Provider Partnership Contracts) with local providers to ensure placements are available. This is in accordance with the need's analysis. A pre procurement engagement event with the market took place on 24 March 2023.

11.14 In addition, there is planned work with Council Housing and larger local Housing Associations to provide existing internal foster carers with properties that have more bedrooms – thereby increasing the capacity of internal foster carer placements. This will reduce the demand for more expensive external Independent Fostering Agencies and again keep our children close to their links in local placements.



12 Preparation for Adulthood Review

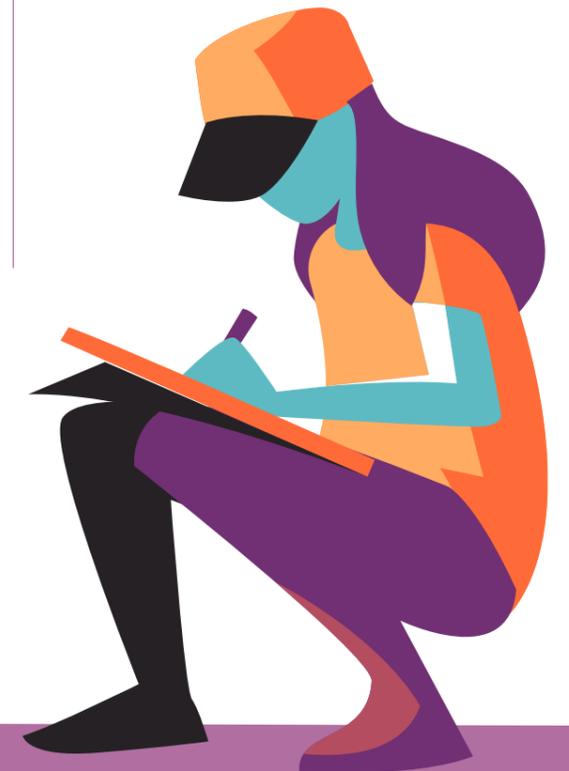
- 12.1 To help prepare our young people for adulthood, early planning is key. At 15 years and 9 months old, a pathway assessment is completed, which should be led by the young person. By 16 a pathway plan is developed. The plan should be aspirational and achievable and identify key steps to assist the journey to independence and adulthood. Recent improvements have been made to the pathway plan format enabling a more streamlined approach that promotes the young person's voice.
- 12.2 Relationships are critical throughout a child's time in care and it is essential that they are well supported as a young person starts to navigate adulthood. Children in Care continue to have an allocated social worker until they are 18.
- 12.3 Young people are allocated a PA at 17, with the goal of allocating them earlier. The PA's role is to build a positive relationship with each young person, as well as share details of the Local Offer, explore independence pathways and ensure necessary documents are in place to help with a smooth transition.

- 12.4 They are aware of the challenges our Care Leavers face once they turn 18 and they are available to advise on matters concerning accommodation, finances, education, training, emotional well-being and other support networks. Crucially the PA role recognises that the impact of being in care does not end at 18, and support will continue to be available until a young person is 25.
- 12.5 Referrals to the Young Adults Transitions Team for those who may need Adult Social Care can be made from 14 and if criteria are met, a Young Adults Social Worker will be allocated and will attend Children in Care Reviews to ensure a smooth transition.
- 12.6 Key work continues with health in relation to a transition to adult health services with specific work about the transitions from CAMHS to AMHS. NEET Panel and Accommodation Panel continue to identify key agencies and strategies to support through the transition process.

13 Conclusion

- 13.1 As noted at the report has highlighted the work across Sandwell Corporate Parenting multi-agency partnership. As addressed at the beginning of the report, while we can evidence examples of good practice across the partnership, there is much more we can do for our Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- 13.2 Moving forward into 2023/2024 the board members and services aim to:
- Continue working in partnership with the LGA to become a beacon for good Corporate Parenting practice and ensure that we become more (parent and less corporate) for our children and young people.
 - Ensure Sandwell Council, partners and the private sector become active as the 'family business' by offering jobs and apprenticeships to Care Leavers.
 - Ensure all Sandwell Council reports demonstrate their impact on Children in Care and Care Leavers.
 - Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board to support our NHS partners to bid for Care Leavers 18-25 years old free optical and dental prescriptions.
 - Launch Sandwell Annual Corporate Parenting week in the summer 2023
 - Review the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020-2023 and launch the new young people's pledges and promises.

- Continue with the Local Offer review, identifying and addressing financial implications where appropriate.
- Ensure all social workers, practitioners, foster carers and managers are trained in Life and Memory work.
- Develop an emotional well-being service for Sandwell Children in Care and Care Leavers to support the needs identified by young people.
- Develop an action plan to reduce the number of Care Leavers 19+ who are NEET.
- Develop a mentoring programme with young people: for young people, they are the experts, and nobody knows more about what it means to be in care than they do.



Corporate Parenting Board Members 2021-2022
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Ann Shackleton (Chair)

Councillor Karen Simms
Councillor Vicki Smith
Councillor Pam Randhawa
Councillor Nicki Hinchcliffe
Councillor Parbinder Kaur
David Stevens, Chief Executive (Until July 2021);
Kim Bromley-Derry, Managing Director Commissioner (From August 2021)
Lesley Hagger, Director of Children and Education services (Until August 2021);
Melanie Barnett, Acting Operational Director of Children and Education Services (August – November 2021)
Michael Jarrett, Director of Children and Education Services (From November 2021)
Rashpal Bishop, Director of Adult Services
Gillian Douglas, Director of Housing
Sally Giles, Strategic Commissioning and Partnerships Manager
Mandip Chahal, Senior Joint Commissioning Manager
Balwant Bains, Head of Looked After Children in Education Virtual School
Erroll Blackwood, Commissioning Manager Connexions
Charlotte Moriarty, Corporate Parenting Co-ordinator

Young people

leasha Hamrahi, Chair of the Voices of Sandwell Board and Chair of the Care Leavers' Forum
Helen Kimber, Care Leavers Forum
Voices of Sandwell – Representative

Sandwell Children's Trust

Jacqui Smith, Chair of Sandwell Children's Trust Board
Emma Taylor, Chief Executive
Steven Gauntley, Director of Operations
Carol Singleton, Interim Quality and Assurance Director
Shanti Eaves, Head of Services Children in Care, Care Leavers, Fostering and Hollies Family centre
Tom Davies, Partnership and Engagement Manager
Rebecca Greenhouse, Care Leavers Team Manager
Michelle O'Farrell Baines, Children in Care and Care Leavers, Service Manager
Claire Tate, Care Leavers Team Manager
Abdul Kahar, Participation Team Manager

NHS

Jane O'Reilly, Designated Nurse for Children in Care, Black Country CCG
Dr Indu Mahabeer, Designated Doctor for Looked After Children

Other Agencies

West Midlands Police
West Midlands Fire Service
Department for Work and Pensions.

Corporate Parenting Members 2022 - 2023
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor Simon Hackett (Chair)
Councillor Piper, Deputy Leader of the Council
Councillor Nicki Hinchcliff
Councillor Ann Shackleton - Chair of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board (Deceased November 2022)
Councillor Elizabeth Giles
Councillor Claire Mayo
Councillor Aqueela Choudhry
Kim Bromley-Derry, Managing Director Commissioner (Until January 2023); Shokat Lal, Chief Executive Director (From February 2023)
Michael Jarrett, Director - Children and Education
Gillian Douglas, Director of Housing
Rashpal Bishop, Director of Adult Services
Sally Giles, Assistant Director – Children's Commissioning, Partnerships, and Improvement
Mandip Chahal, Senior Joint Commissioning Manager
Balwant Bains, Head of Looked After Children in Education Virtual School
Kelly Thomas, Skills & Employability Service Manager for Skills & Employment Service

Young people

leasha Khan (Hamrahi), Chair of the Voices of Sandwell
Helen Kimber, Co-Chair of the Voices of Sandwell
Voices of Sandwell – Representatives

Sandwell Children's Trust

Jacqui Smith, Chair of Sandwell Children's Trust Board
Emma Taylor, Chief Executive
Tara Malik, Director of Strategy and Transformation
Steven Gauntley, Director of Operations
Teodora Bot, Director of Practice Quality and Partnerships
Sarah Grant, Head of Service – Children in Care
Tom Davies, Partnership and Engagement Manager
Abdul Kahar, Looked After Children Participation Team Manager

NHS

Dr Indu Mahabeer, Designated Doctor for Looked After Children, Black Country ICB
Jane O'Reilly, Designated Nurse Children and Young People in Care, Black Country ICB
Claire Hickman, Designated Nurse Children and Young People in Care, Black Country ICB
Wendy Harrison-Frazer, Consultant Counselling Psychologist/Professional Lead for Psychology CAMHS, Black Country Healthcare Foundation Trust

Paulette Morris, General Manager, Children, Young People and Families, Black Country Healthcare Foundation Trust

Other Agencies

West Midlands Police
West Midlands Fire Service
Department for Work and Pensions



